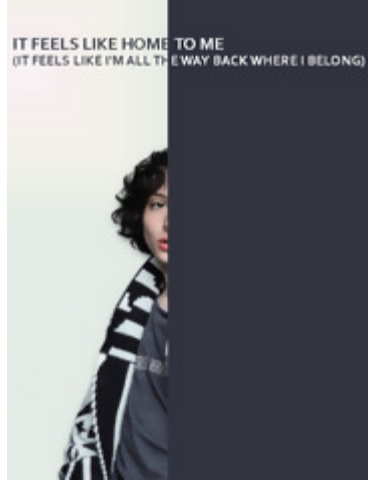
IT FEELS LIKE HOME TO ME
(IT FEELS LIKE I'M ALL THE WAY BACK WHERE I BELONG)

It Feels Like Home To Me by Brown Eyes Parker

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It Feels Like Home To Me

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"*If you knew how happy you are making me*
I never thought I could love anyone so much."

"My mom says I should come and help you get the house ready for El's arrival," Mike explained when Hopper opened the door one sunny morning in early December. "I guess it'll make the ...time go by faster or something."

Hopper laughed and stepped aside to let Mike in. "I know what you mean. I'm anxious for them to come home too." he paused and shook his head like he was catching himself. "I mean, I'm looking forward to El getting home too. Will and I were just finishing breakfast and then we're going to the hardware store to buy paint. I don't know why I let Joyce talk me into buying a fixer-upper when I have a perfectly good cabin all ready to live in."

Mike assumed the last part of the conversation was Hopper talking aloud to himself. He turned his attention to Will, who was eating a powdered doughnut and doodling on a napkin.

"Hi Mike," he said. "Want something to eat or drink? The Chief would let you have coffee if you asked.

Under different circumstances, getting to try coffee would be an offer Mike couldn't refuse. But he doesn't have the patience to sit down and drink or eat anything. The days were already dragging out long enough as it was. He shook his head. "I'm okay right now," he replied. "Thank you though."

Will smirked but refrained from teasing him. "I think Jim likes my mom," he told him instead.

"I know. El told me," Mike answered.

Will sighed. "Of course she did."

Mike shrugged. "El and I tell each other everything. Not having

secrets is good for our relationship. So, um, how do you feel about The Chief and your mom?"

"I haven't had much time to think about it," Will admitted. "I only just figured it out. El rightfully belonging with him just smells kind of fishy, doesn't it?"

"I'm happy you guys are moving back to Hawkins. It'll be nice, being back together again almost every day—"

"You can start taking El out on real dates," Will added jokingly.

"If Hop'll let me."

"You should ask him for permission to date her. It'll be kind of romantic and I think Hopper would—"

"Let's get a move on boys!" Hopper interrupted, pulling on his coat as he came into the kitchen to round them up. "We have a lot to do in a short amount of time! Will, do you have the list your mom gave you over the phone last night?"

Will nodded. "It's in my pocket."

"Good! Let's get to it then. I want to have the kitchen painted before dinner tonight."

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"What did you do today?" El asked Mike later on that night as he lay in bed, his arms a little sore from all the painting he had done. He had used muscles he had only *heard* existed.

"Oh you know," he said trying to sound casual. "Helped The Chief around your new house. We painted the kitchen today. It helps pass the time, so I'm not sitting around waiting for you to come back. Countdowns just make the distance harder because I know you're coming back and it's still so far away."

"I wish I could have come back with Will and Hop," El answered. "But I didn't want Joyce to be alone with the packing. . ." she trailed off and lowered her voice. "I miss you though."

"I miss you too. . ." Mike paused and looked at the little makeshift calendar beside his bed. "But it's only 10 more days until we're together again, I can do it if you can."

"I'll be home in time for Christmas," El mused.

"Yeah."

Mike didn't tell her, her returning to Hawkins was the best Christmas present that he could ever ask for. Instead, he asked her what she had done with her day and listened contentedly while she chatted about the monotony of repacking an already half-unpacked house.

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"You should go with Jim to pick up the pizza," Will told Mike, brandishing his paintbrush at him. "He's in a good mood and you might not get another chance to talk to him by yourself."

"If I go with him, who's going to stay here with you?"

Will rolled his eyes. "Mike," he said sternly. "I'll be fine for a few minutes by myself. *Go*! Maybe I'll finally be able to get some work done without you stopping to wax poetic about El's hair and interrupting my flow."

"I liked it better when you were quieter," Mike grumbled even though he didn't mean it. "Hold on Chief, I'll come with you for the drive."

Will grinned at him. "Good luck!"

Mike shot him a fake dirty look as he darted outside and into the car just before Hopper left. He buckled in and smiled uncertainly at the older man.

Hopper huffed. "What do you want to talk about, Kid?"

"I was hoping. . ." Mike could feel his heart beating hard in his chest and for a second, he considered not saying anything at all. He could just be her friend for the rest of their lives but a voice in the back of his mind that sounded suspiciously like his father's told him not to be a coward. "I want to be able to see El again when she comes back to

Hawkins—"

"You'll be able to see her," Hopper interjected. "At school and on the weekends."

"I want to *date* her!" Mike said, his courage growing a little bit more with every word he spoke, he released a deep breath. "I'd be willing to follow by whatever rules you saw fit to layout for us."

Hopper looked a little taken aback and for a second the only thing Mike could hear was blood rushing in his ears and Bruce Springsteen's cover of *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town*.

Then Hopper nodded. "Yeah, I knew you were going to want to keep dating her when she got home. I'm already way ahead of you, actually. I've discussed it with Joyce and we both agree that it's fine if you continue to see each other as long as you abide by the rules we set for you. There will be a curfew and you will stick with it. When I tell you to go home, I'll tell you if you get an extra five minutes or not. . . *and* you *will* keep the door open three inches if you hang out in her bedroom. I am sorry to inform you, none of these are negotiable."

"Yeah. . . well, my loving El isn't negotiable either!" Mike blurted out, his eyes widened as soon as the words left his mouth.

He was surprised by his boldness. He had told himself that going forward, he'd be more respectful when it came to is interactions with Hopper because he didn't want him a reason to keep them apart. Again. He tensed, waiting for the older man to say he changed his mind. El couldn't see him after all.

To his surprise (and relief), Hopper chuckled. "Well. I *knew* that!" he told him like it was a great joke. If he was the least bit bothered by Mike loving his daughter, he didn't let on.

Mike smiled weakly, almost waiting for more terms and conditions. But Hopper just turned up the music and it almost felt like they were friends.

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Suddenly, the day El was supposed to come home arrived. There was nothing left to do except to wait for her return. Since Mike was so antsy, Karen put Mike to work helping Holly write *another* letter to Santa and wrapping gifts for relatives they only saw once or twice a year. Still, the hours dragged on.

Mike wasn't even sure he'd get to see her as soon as she reached Hawkins. Hopper probably had plans for a quiet *family* night at home. But the anticipation of getting to see her as soon as the next day was enough to drive him crazy.

"A watched pot never boils," Ted informed him when he got home from work and found Mike staring at the stove clock, willing it to move forward a little faster.

"Could you please answer the phone, Michael?" Karen called, her hands were covered in dough for the chicken pot pie she was preparing for dinner.

Mike nodded, leaving his father to his metaphors as he picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi, it's Will!"

A wave of panic washed over Mike. "Hey Will. Is everything alright?" he asked uneasily, imagining El and Mrs. Hopper had been in a car accident or delayed because it had started to snow over the course of the day.

Will laughed. "Don't worry. Everything's *fine*!" he assured him. "My mom stopped at a payphone because she wanted me to call and tell you that El's headed in your direction right now—"

Mike didn't let him finish, he hung up the phone with a clatter, his heart started to beat rapidly in his chest as he rushed around the living room like a chicken with its head cut off. He pulled his boots on and grabbed his coat. "I'll be back soon!" he shouted.

"Where are you going, Michael?" Karen inquired as he yanked the door open.

He didn't bother to answer her, he would take whatever punishment

he had coming to him later. He started to run as fast as he could so he would be able to meet El halfway. Suddenly, he saw her sprinting towards him.

"El" He called. *"EL"*

Before either one of them could stop, they crashed into each other at the speed of light.

"*Sorry!"* El gasped as she took big gulps of air.

Mike was having trouble breathing too but he didn't know if it was from exerting himself more than usual or how beautiful she looked bathed in Christmas lights and December snow. "El, didn't you hear me calling for you?"

El shook her head. "Thought it was Joyce," she answered as she inhaled deeply. "Wanted to see *you*."

"I know. She stopped at a payphone and called Will to have him tell me that you were on your way over." He laughed at the look on her face, stopping short. "Hey, you aren't wearing a coat!"

"I'm fine!" El insisted as he shrugged out of his.

The words weren't even out of her mouth when she started to shiver violently. "You're freezing!" he objected as he started to zip her up.

"What are *you* going to do? You're going to be cold too!"

"I'm fine, I swear!" Mike insisted. "Besides, you know we're not going to be able to be out here for long anyway. Mrs. Byers will probably come to pick you up soon."

El ignored him and stripped his coat off. "Put it back on!" she demanded, serving him a look that said she was about to get her own way.

For a second, Mike considered arguing and then did as she was told. A few seconds later, he was glad that he had listened to her. She was tucking her arms around him and burrowing into his chest.

"That works!" Mike smiled at her and sighing deeply as he embraced her, pulling her as close as possible, shutting his eyes. "I'm so happy you're home. Sometimes I thought today would never get here. The time has been dragging out since Mrs. Byers and The Chief decided you were going to come back. Even though we talked every day, including yesterday."

El huffed. "I *know*! The drive lasted *forever*!" she informed him.

"I didn't even think I'd get to see you today," Mike admitted.

El giggled. "I was going to make sure I saw you whether my dad liked it or not."

"He's probably sick of seeing me by now. I've been helping him with the house so it would be ready for you when you got here. Well, except for your room. Mrs. Byers thought you might want to do that yourself. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before. I wanted it to be a surprise."

"It's fine. I'm just thankful the two of you are getting along."

"We still have to keep the door open three inches. It was non-negotiable when he gave me permission to continue dating you." Mike beamed at her, still proud of himself for the way the conversation with Hopper had turned out. "I told him my loving you was non-negotiable."

If El wanted to say anything, she was interrupted by Joyce pulling up and jumping out of the moving van. She tossed El's coat at them. "I hate to break up this party you two but I don't want Hop to send out a SWAT team if we don't show up soon. We're already late as it is. Do you want to come and have dinner with us? I asked your mom and she said it would be okay."

Mike grinned. "Mrs. Byers, I would love to join you guys for dinner!" he answered as he helped El into her coat after she had untangled herself from his arms.

He reached out and took her hand as soon as he could, he was afraid if he let her go then she would disappear. Her fingers threaded

through his reassured him that he wasn't dreaming about her anymore. He didn't plan on ever letting her go again unless she asked him to.

He really hopes she'll let him stay forever though because when he looked at her, he was home.

The End

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Author's Note:

I probably have more where this came from. I have at least one more story about Hopper and Joyce up my sleeve for this universe. Maybe a future!Mileven fic. I don't know we'll see where the muse takes me. If you liked this, please tell me. I'm looking forward to hearing about your thoughts and feelings.

The title of this came from "Feels Like Home" by Chantal Kreviazuk and *of course,* you should listen "With Love" by Rachel Portman because that's what started this whole thing in the first place.

Until Next Time!

Love,

Holly, 10/18/2019